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BLACK PANTHER



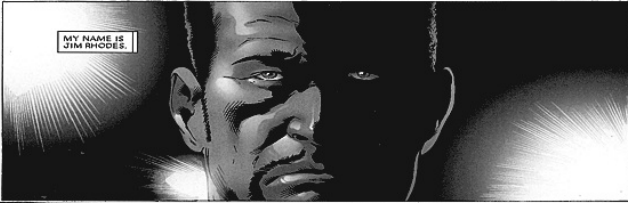
PREVIOUSLY

Unfettered by the yoke of colonization, the African warrior nation of WAKANDA flourished and became a high-tech, resource-rich, ecologically-sound paradise—one that makes the rest of the world seem primitive in comparison. Ruling over this kingdom are the BLACK PANTHER and his queen, STORM.

The Black Panther is more than just a head of state, the leader of a warrior cult. The Black Panther is the embodiment of the ideals of a people. While T'Challa's marriage to Storm was a happy occasion, the couple was reminded that Wakanda faces difficult times ahead. Now more than ever, Wakanda needs the Black Panther to preserve its integrity and guide its people through the political minefield created by the Civil War in the United States.

To assuage the fears of those who would see them as a threat and to ensure Wakanda's security in a world rocked by Civil War, the Black Panther and Storm thought it best to embark upon a diplomatic tour amongst the larger centers of global power. The couple's first stop was Latveria, where they were drawn into battle with their longtime adversary, Dr. Doom. Their second, the Moon, to serve as counsel to the Inhuman royal family. And their most recent visit: Atlantis, where Namor suggested T'Challa lead the global resistance against America's Superhuman Registration Act!

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MY NAME IS
JIM RHODES.



ALSO KNOWN
AS THE WAR
MACHINE.



BECAUSE OF MY LONG
FRIENDSHIP WITH TONY
STARK, I AM THE ONLY
OTHER GUY EVER TO
WEAR THE WORLD'S
GREATEST WEAPON.

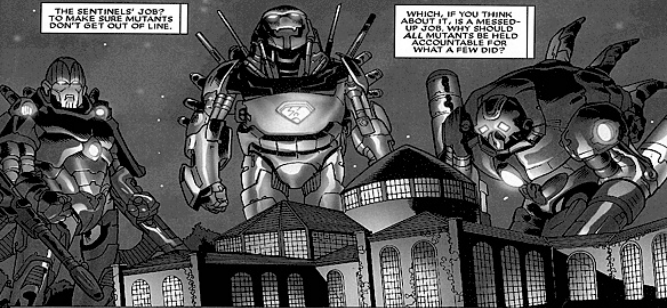
SO WHEN GENERAL LAZER
ASKED ME TO LEAD UP THE
NEW SENTINEL PROGRAM,
I WASN'T INTO IT,
BUT I OWED MY MAN...



SO HERE
I AM.

THE SENTINELS' JOB?
TO MAKE SURE MUTANTS
DON'T GET OUT OF LINE.

WHICH, IF YOU THINK
ABOUT IT, IS A MESSED-
UP JOB. WHY SHOULD
ALL MUTANTS BE HELD
ACCOUNTABLE FOR
WHAT A FEW DID?



THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF THE
SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION
ACT. IT DOESN'T JUST PICK ON
MUTANTS, OR EVEN HUMANS
WITH SUPER POWERS. ANYONE
WHO WANTS TO BE MORE
THAN A CIVILIAN, ANYONE
WHO WANTS TO PLAY IN THE
BIG LEAGUES OF HELPING THIS
WORLD, MUST REGISTER.

THERE'S
ACCOUNTABILITY.



HISTORICALLY SPEAKING, UNCLE SAM HAS ALWAYS
KEPT AN EYE ON THE POPULACE. SOMETIMES WITH
THE INTENT OF PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE MINORITY
FROM VIGILANTES WITH A SKEWED IDEA OF JUSTICE.

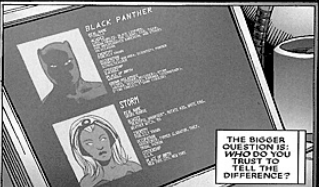


SOMETIMES WITH THE
INTENT OF MONITORING
THE MINORITY ITSELF.



WERE THE BLACK
PANTHERS OF THE
'60S TERRORISTS...
OR MERELY CITIZENS
PRACTICING
SELF-DEFENSE?

THAT DEPENDS ON
WHO YOU ASK.



THE BIGGER
QUESTION IS:
WHO DO YOU
TRUST TO
TELL THE
DIFFERENCE?

YOU, OF ALL
PEOPLE, KNOW
IT'S INAPPROPRIATE
TO COMMENT ON THE
LOCAL POLITICS OF
ANOTHER COUNTRY.
'CHALLA

A BETTER QUESTION
WOULD BE, WHY ARE YOU
INVOLVING YOURSELF
IN THIS?

BECAUSE HE HAS A CONSCIENCE, BRIAN. ISN'T
THAT WHAT WE "SUPER HEROES" DO? STAND UP
FOR THE RIGHT THING, REGARDLESS OF
NATIONAL BOUNDARIES?

RIIIIIIGHT. FORGOT
ABOUT THAT.
THANKS.

AND YOU'RE
CERTAIN THAT
FIGHTING
REGISTRATION
IS THE RIGHT
THING?

BRIAN,
REGARDLESS OF HOW
YOU FEEL ABOUT THE TRAGEDY
AT STAMFORD, AND HOW YOU
FEEL ABOUT VIGILANTES, WHAT'S
HAPPENING IN AMERICA IS WRONG.

WE CAN'T JUST
SIT ON THE SIDELINES.

LOOK, THIS ISN'T AS SIMPLE AS TEAMING UP
TO FIGHT DOC OCK. YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT REED
RICHARDS, TONY STARK—SOME OF THE SMARTEST,
MOST HONORABLE MEN ON THE PLANET!

AFTER ALL THE TIME
YOU'VE SPENT FIGHTING ALONGSIDE
MUTANTS, YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND THAT
GOVERNMENTS HATE AND FEAR SUPERHUMANS?
THAT THIS IS AN EXCUSE TO LOCK THEM UP
AND THROW AWAY THE KEY?

YOU'RE
EXACTLY RIGHT
ON THAT, ORORO. HUMANUS DO FEAR
US. THE QUESTION IS,
HOW DO WE REDUCE
THAT FEAR?

NOT AT
THE COST OF
WHOLESALE
INJUSTICE.



XAVIER FORMED
A SUPER-TEAM TO
PROVE TO HUMANITY
THAT MUTANTS
WERE NOT TO BE
FEARED.



IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE NOT GOING TO CONVINCE
EACH OTHER TODAY, BRIAN. I APPRECIATE YOU
TAKING TIME TO HEAR ME OUT.



YOU'RE A
REASONABLE MAN,
T'CHALLA. I'M SURE
YOUR PRESENCE IN
THIS MATTER WILL
BE A CALMING
INFLUENCE.



AND YOU,
ORORO, I HOPE
YOU'RE NOT
TOO CROSS
AT ME.



NOT CROSS,
JUST DISAPPOINTED.
YOU'VE LED A VERY
PRIVILEGED LIFE, BRIAN.
YOUR TRUST IN THE
SYSTEM REFLECTS
THAT.



UH, T'CHALLA? ONE MORE THING. THE EBONY
BLADE? VALUABLE BRITISH ARTIFACT...
PART OF OUR NATIONAL HERITAGE...? ANY
CHANCE YOU'LL GIVE THAT BACK...?

YOU MEAN
THE ONE I TOOK
FROM AN ASSASSIN
HIRED TO KILL
ME?



WHEN I'M
DONE WITH IT,
I'LL LET YOU
KNOW.



—HERE WE SEE THE KING AND QUEEN OF WAKANDA DONATING HI-TECH ARTIFICIAL LIMBS TO MAIMED CHILDREN IN RWANDA—



WITH SO MUCH CONFLICT IN THE WORLD, WE THOUGHT THE BEST WAY TO COMBAT IS THROUGH ACTS OF LOVE.

OH FOR PETE'S SAKE!



DO THEY REALLY EXPECT PEOPLE TO BUY INTO THIS SHAMELESS POLITICAL PANDERING?

HELPING MAIMED KIDS IS ENDEARING TO THE PUBLIC, SIR. PERHAPS IF IRON MAN CAN WHIP UP SOMETHING SIMILAR--



NOT YOUR DEPARTMENT, ROSS. KEEP YOUR BRIGHT IDEAS TO YOURSELF.

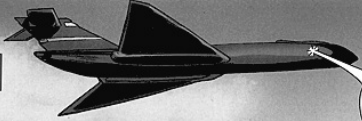
BESIDES, THEY THOUGHT OF IT FIRST. WE'D LOOK LIKE COPYCATS.

GOOD POINT, SIR.



NEXT STOP FOR THE ROYAL COUPLE IS THE UNITED STATES, WHERE THEY HAVE MEETINGS SCHEDULED WITH OPRAH WINFREY AND THE PRESIDENT!

I'VE GOT A BETTER IDEA!



"WE'LL USE THAT
GOOD P.R. THEY'RE
STOCKING UP ON
AGAINST THEM."

I KNOW
YOU'VE BEEN IN
MORE THAN YOUR
FAIR SHARE OF
BRUTAL LIFE-AND-
DEATH BATTLES,
ORORO, BUT THIS
IS POLITICS.

IF POLITICS MEANS HELPING
KIDS LIKE THAT, THEN YES,
I LOVE POLITICS.

I WISH IT
WERE, ORORO.
WE'VE GOT A VERY
DANGEROUS ENEMY
AHEAD OF US.

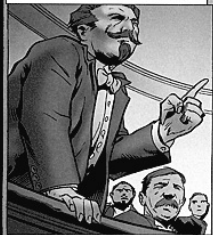
SO WHAT'S OUR PLAN
BESIDES BUILDING PUBLIC
SUPPORT?

IT'S MULTI-
PRONGED:

"OUR LOBBYISTS IN WASHINGTON
HAVE MADE LARGE CONTRIBUTIONS
TO CONSERVATIVE CONGRESSMEN
WHO'LL ARGUE THAT THE SUPERHUMAN
REGISTRATION ACT SHOULD BE
OVERTURNED BECAUSE IT REPRESENTS
MORE BIG GOVERNMENT INTERUSION
INTO THE LIVES OF AMERICANS.

"MEANWHILE, MY AGENTS IN LONDON
ARE MAKING A SERIES OF CIRCUITOUS
STOCK TRANSACTIONS THROUGH SHELL
CORPORATIONS TO ATTEMPT TO GAIN A
CONTROLLING SHARE OF STARK ENTERPRISES.

"STARK WILL NO
DOUBT BE ANTICIPATING
AN ATTACK ON HIS
LIVELIHOOD AND WILL
HAVE A 'POISON PILL'
DEFENSE READY."



HOW
DID YOUR
CALL TO THE
X-MEN
GO?

NOT
WELL.



"NOT WELL
AT ALL."

SORRY,
STORM, LIKE
I TOLD TONY
WE'RE SITTING
THIS ONE
OUT.

WHAT DOES
THAT MEAN,
"SITTING THIS
ONE OUT"?

SO RATHER
THAN JOIN WITH
YOUR FELLOW HEROES,
YOU WOULD LET THEM
BE IMPRISONED TO
TEACH THE WORLD
A LESSON?

IN A
WORD,
STORM,
YES.

WE DON'T
HAVE SECRET
IDENTITIES. THERE'S
A REASON I GO BY
EMMA FROST AND
NOT "DIAMOND LASS."
FOR ONCE, IT'S NOT
OUR FIGHT.

IT MEANS THAT
AFTER THE SCARLET
WITCH RESHAPED REALITY,
MUTANTS DON'T NEED ANY
MORE IMAGE PROBLEMS. SAD
TO SAY, BUT THE SCREWUP IN
STAMFORD--THIS WHOLE "CIVIL
WAR"--ACTUALLY TAKES THE
HEAT OFF US. LETS THE PUBLIC
KNOW THAT ALL KIND OF
SUPER-POWERED FOLK MAKE
MISTAKES. NOT JUST
MUTANTS.

SO NO
HELP FROM
THE X-MEN.

THIS WOULD
HAVE NEVER
HAPPENED WHEN
I LED THE
TEAM!



MEANWHILE, AT THE SENTINEL
COMMAND CENTER...

TONY
NEEDS HELP.
I'M GONNA
GIVE IT.

WITH YOUR
SENTINEL.

LISTEN, YOU'VE
WATCHED THE NEWS.
TONY CAN'T BE EVERY-
WHERE, SO THINGS HAVE
GONE BAD IN PLACES.
I CAN HELP.

THIS IS A REALLY HAIRY SITUATION
TODAY, JIM. LOTS OF CIVILIANS.
AND THEY ALL THINK THIS
BLACK PANTHER GUY IS
THE BEST THING SINCE
SLICED BREAD.

WHAT'S
YOUR TAKE
ON HIM?

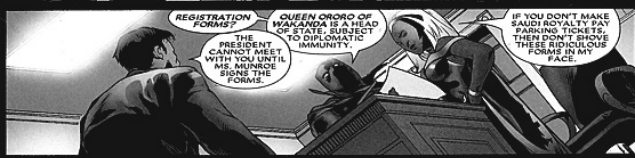
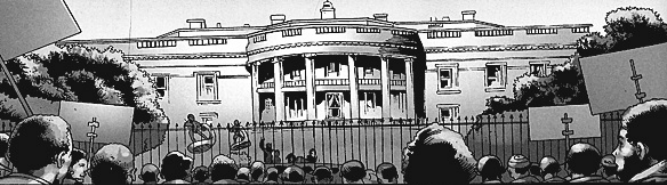
OH MAN, IS
BLACK PANTHER THE
NEW LITMUS TEST
QUESTION?

THE QUESTION
WHITES ASK BLACKS
TO SEE IF THEY ARE
ANTI-WHITE OR TOO
"PRO-BLACK" OR
WHATEVER.

HEY, RELAX--I WAS
JUST ASKING A
QUESTION!

TO BE HONEST,
IF I WAS TASKED
TO TAKE DOWN
CAPTAIN AMERICA,
I DON'T KNOW IF I
COULD DO IT.

THAT'S WHY
I'M HELPING
AND YOU'RE
NOT.





TONY, I KNOW YOU'RE WATCHING ALL OF THIS. I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE PLAYING THIS GAME.

I DON'T KNOW WHICH IS MORE INSULTING-- TRYING TO ENTRAP OROSO INTO REGISTRATION, OR SENDING THIS LOW-LEVEL FUNCTIONARY TO DO IT!



ARE YOU REFERRING TO TONY STARK, SIR? BECAUSE HE IS NOT ON WHITE HOUSE GROUNDS.

OF COURSE NOT. YOU DIDN'T WANT IT TO LOOK LIKE WE WERE SIGNING OUT OF COERCION OR FRIENDSHIP. THAT WOULD RUIN THE LITTLE PROPAGANDA TAPE YOU WERE MAKING.



YOUR HIGHNESS, THERE WAS CERTAINLY NO INTENTION TO OFFEND YOU. PLEASE STAY AND LET'S TALK THROUGH THIS--

THAT IS THE WHOLE POINT. NO ONE HERE WANTS TO TALK. THEY JUST WANT EVERYONE TO COMPLY WITH THEIR COMMANDS.



I AM NOT RIDING IN YOUR STUPID GASOLINE-BURNING CAR. I WILL NOT TOLERATE ANOTHER OF YOUR CULTURAL INADEQUACIES A SECOND LONGER.



THERE'S A NO-FLY ZONE AROUND THE WHITE HOUSE, YOUR HIGHNESS. SO WE CANNOT BRING THE PLANE HERE WITHOUT INCIDENT. BUT WE WILL BRING A WAKANDAN-SANCTIONED VEHICLE HERE IMMEDIATELY.

FINE.

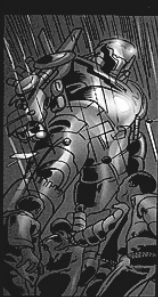




! O O M !













RHODEY! ARE YOU OKAY?

Y-YEAH, TONY. I'M FINE.



HIS VITALS ARE THERE BUT HE'S GOING INTO SHO--

SAVE IT, T'CHALLA. I'M GETTING COMPLETE READOUTS ON HIS MEDICAL CONDITION.



I'M HOLDING YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS.

WE CAME IN PEACE, TONY.

AND I TOLD YOU NOT TO INTERFERE AS A FRIEND AND A GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE--

TONY, YOU'RE USED TO GETTING YOUR WAY, ONE WAY OR THE OTHER, BUT DON'T EVEN THINK OF TELLING ME WHAT TO DO...EVER.

WE SHOULD LEAVE, YOUR HIGHNESS.



WE'RE NOT DONE WITH THIS.



I KNOW.



THE BIKE—
IT JUST WENT
DEAD!

IT'S IRON
MAN. HE SHUT
IT DOWN
REMOТЕLY.



DON'T EVEN BOTHER
THROWING A LIGHTNING
BOLT AT ME. IT WILL JUST
MAKE ME ANGRIER.

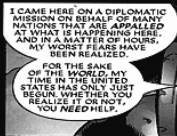








T'CHALLA, RHODEY'S RIGHT. I'D HAPPY TO STAND DOWN. YOU'VE GOT A COUNTRY OF YOUR OWN TO DEAL WITH.



I CAME HERE ON A DIPLOMATIC MISSION ON BEHALF OF MANY NATIONS THAT ARE APPALLED AT WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE. AND IN A MATTER OF HOURS, MY WORST FEARS HAVE BEEN REALIZED.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD, MY TIME IN THE UNITED STATES HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN. WHETHER YOU REALIZE IT OR NOT, YOU NEED HELP.



AND YOU SAY WE'RE ARROGANT!

IF YOU CAN'T SEE THINGS ARE OUT OF CONTROL, YOU'RE COMPLETELY BLIND, TONY. I DON'T KNOW ALL THE FACTS. I WON'T TAKE ACTION UNTIL I DO, BUT UNDERSTAND THIS:

WORLD TOUR PART FOUR INSIDE MAN

REGINALD HUDLIN
WRITER

MANUEL GARCIA
PENCILS

JAY LEISTEN
WITH SEAM PARSONS
INKS

MATT MILLA
COLORS

VC'S RANDY DENTILE
LETTERS

DANIEL KETCHUM
ASSISTANT EDITOR

AXEL ALONSO
EDITOR

JOE QUESADA
CHIEF

DAN BUCKLEY
PUBLISHER



I AM NOT LEAVING.

NEXT ISSUE: WARTIME!

WALK THE KING!

Greetings, fellow Panther fans! Assistant Editor Daniel Ketchum here, bringing you the latest from Wakanda and abroad. As always, we've got plenty of mail. Let's go to it!

Mail to the King.

BLACK PANTHER #20 was entertaining, but I am getting tired of the whole "Black Bolt can't communicate" thing. Doesn't he know how to use a pencil or a keyboard? Don't the Inhumans have telepaths? How can they be so advanced, yet be unable to come up with a way for deaf or mute individuals to communicate, like American Sign Language? Inquiring minds want to know.

Sincerely,
Jackie Williams
Louisville, KY

I've always imagined Black Bolt's rapport with his family—especially Medusa—is a particularly strong one. Their communication is more a matter of intuition than anything. They don't always need to articulate their thoughts to each other, because they are often aligned. Medusa will look at Black Bolt and be able to understand him clearly, in their own way, they are communicating.

Of course, I will concede: maybe there are times when a little ASL wouldn't hurt.

Dear Daniel,

Even though there were some passages and details that I really enjoyed, I didn't like the "Wedding of the Century" story arc too much. Excessive hugs, kisses and tears; too much sentimentalism and corny dialogue everywhere. Too cloying for my taste, while the action aspect was mostly omitted. Panther and Storm are the perfect happy couple. They are totally in love with each other and their relationship is 100% functional. Not that I'm wishing bad luck to the newlyweds, but having some disagreements and quarrels from time to time would help to make their relationship look more real and vivid. It would also create more interest and expectancy in the readership, in my humble opinion.

Well, now that all the wedding stuff is over, I hope that Hudlin surprises us again with captivating, challenging and full action storylines in the line of "Who is the Black Panther?" or "Two the Hard Way," two of my personal favorites of all times. Hail to the Panther Crew and bring on the "Black Avengers."

Gratefully,
Veronica Rodriguez

Hopefully, the "World Tour" story has addressed some of your concerns, Veronica. I would say that the brawl between the Black Panther and Iron Man was anything but sentimental! As for tension between Storm and T'Challa, I'd say we've seen some of that too. (And with Civil War in the couple's future, it's probably safe to assume T'Challa and Storm will soon be faced with plenty of hard times and difficult decisions!)

Hey guys,

I am a huge fan of Storm and have recently become a huge fan of the Black Panther as well. While I do feel the wedding was slightly rushed, I am happy to see Storm in a new position where she has the potential for growth.

Storm's portrayal in the BLACK PANTHER "House of M" tie-in as well as the "Wild Kingdom" crossover was dead-on. Hudlin brought back the strong and powerful goddess who was still human and tangible, very different from the stale role she had assumed during her latter appearances in UNCANNY X-MEN. Seeing this characterization of my favorite character, I had no problem embracing

and looking forward to what else Hudlin had in store for her.

This was unfortunately short-lived as since Black Panther and Storm became an official couple, I feel her role has been reduced to Black Panther's wife. While I am aware the book is called BLACK PANTHER and not BLACK PANTHER & STORM, I do feel her character is in need of a huge upgrade. Beyond seeming "dumb struck" by love in the last few issues, her lines in BLACK PANTHER #19 seemed extremely subservient, which is anything but what we have come to expect from Storm. Not only were her powers downplayed during the battle against Doom (who for some reason has become both racist and sexist), but when she gains the upper hand while Black Panther is fighting Doom one-on-one, she is reprimanded for it. Not only this, but her response is "What's wrong, Beloved?" "gag". The REAL Storm would not have taken that so easily, nor would any powerful woman. This is not the only flaw I have observed in Storm's character, but it affected me enough to make me actually write a letter.

Her mere presence in the book is not going to make Storm fans happy, especially if she is written out of character. Even if she does confront every other being she encounters as a strong and powerful hero (which she hasn't), bowing down to Black Panther and giving in to him just because she is HIS wife and this is HIS book is not acceptable.

The last great characterization of Storm was in Claremont's UNCANNY X-MEN Annual. Storm talks to Jean about her many fears, one being "living just to produce [T'Challa's] heirs (humming wasn't hinted at Storm being pregnant in BLACK PANTHER #187). By the end of the issue Storm confronts the Panther God stating, "If I accept his proposal, I will face him as his equal and will be accepted as his equal by all, or this is as far as it goes." I have yet to see the equality in this relationship, as it appears Black Panther is calling all the shots and Storm is simply there to agree to everything he says. Any thought of her own is quickly thrown out by her agreeing to her "beloved's" ideas or putting trust in him. How about we see a little of the reverse where T'Challa puts his trust in Ororo, or where she steps up to take command? Storm has been the leader of the X-Men forever. I am sure she is more than capable of making intelligent decisions not only for herself but for her people as the new Queen of Wakanda.

I am sure many of Storm's fans, including myself, have followed her here in hopes we would see her in a new light, but instead she appears to be walking in the shadow of the Black Panther. Please remedy this.

Thank you,
Andre Clarke
Brooklyn, NY

I, myself, am a huge fan of Storm. I definitely see where you're coming from, as do a number of fellow readers. I thought it best to go right to the source on this one. Here is Reggie's response to your letter:

T'Challa and Ororo are both strong leaders in their own right. They are also newlyweds. Anyone who has been married knows that there is an... "adjustment" period for any couple... even super-couples. Or rather, ESPECIALLY super-couples. Sure, I could have written it so everything was perfect, but that's not the Marvel way, is it? No, we believe in making our fantasy lives as awkward and difficult as our real lives. If you're asking if Storm is going to change, no, not in the sense of what makes her a great character. Her core values and strengths will never be reduced. However, I also I believe that

a great relationship means that you change each other for the better. Keep reading, and you'll see everything you're looking for and more.

Dear Reggie,

What a great book, man. And what makes BLACK PANTHER consistently good is that it's political—the only title I know of that has the guts to speak its mind. And even better—the title is BLACK PANTHER and that is heavy with history.

Please don't cave to the right-wing Bush administration cares nothing for African-Americans. They let my hometown of New Orleans get destroyed and stay devastated. Thank you so much for the issue where the Panther helped out the folks in the Crescent City. And thanks for giving us our superhero who specifically gives a damn for black people. Marvel's lucky to have you.

Power to the King
Jordan Hoff
Monmouth, O

Thank you for your letter, Jordan!

Random fact: Did you know that the character Black Panther predates the Black Panther Party? Who knew?

Next month, BLACK PANTHER takes on MARVEL CIVIL WAR! After meeting with Dr. Doom, the Inhumans, the Sub-Mariner, and Iron Man himself, Marvel's newest power couple is ready to take a stand.

Here's a peek at our next issue:



Where else are they on? Be here in thirty minutes!

--Daniel

RICH GINTER
PRODUCTION

DANIEL KETCHUM
ASSISTANT EDITOR

AXEL ALONSO
EDITOR

JOE QUESADA
CHIEF

MAIL TO THE KING @ MARVEL COMICS
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